

# THE TENNESSEAN

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## Senators relying on spurious Tennessee Walking Horse economic data | Opinion

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### Key Points

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The PAST Act (Prevent All Soring Tactics) has been reintroduced to Congress as an attempt once again to stop all Tennessee Walking Horse "big lick" pain-inducing training methods. Once again U.S. Sens. Lamar Alexander and Marsha Blackburn oppose the legislation, citing spurious economic impacts.

Our two senators recurrently claim, in the words of Blackburn, "The Tennessee Walking Horse industry plays a vital role in our state's agricultural economy." Alexander's May 14 press release states that the industry supports more than 20,000 jobs nationwide and pumps \$3.2 billion into the nation's economy."

These numbers are unsupported by any study of economic impacts. Besides, the "big lick"-trained show horses are a small fraction of all Tennessee Walking Horses.

Alexander used these numbers in a 2017 press release. Blackburn merely parrots the senior senator. Tennessee Agricultural Commissioner Julius Johnson may have been the first to provide public testimony about economic impacts. He appeared Nov. 13, 2013, before a U.S. House of Representatives Committee to discuss the "Importance of the Tennessee Walking Horse Industry to Tennessee." However, he clearly referenced Tennessee's entire equine Industry when he reported that the total impact was \$1.4 billion and 20,309 jobs created.

Johnson cited data from a 2010 study by University of Tennessee agricultural

economists (R. Jamey Menard, et al., “Tennessee Equine Industry: Overview and Estimated Economic Impacts.”) Menard estimated the economic impacts of owning and showing all Tennessee horses, not just Walking Horses. Their study was based on the first comprehensive survey of Tennessee horse breeds (Debra Kenerson and Joel Moore, 2004. “A Tennessee Tradition, Equine 2004,” U.S. Department of Agriculture, Tennessee Agricultural Statistics.) Expenditure data in Menard are 2003 values.

Menard adjusted Kenerson and Moore's 2003 dollar values to 2006 dollars to run the IMPLAN economic model and then inflated the results to 2010 dollars. Skipping over their well-explained economic modeling efforts, the source of Johnson's \$1.4 billion total economic impacts and 20,000 jobs is 2003 equine activities -- not 2010, not just Tennessee Walking Horses and certainly not relevant for public discussion in 2019.

Menard's economic impacts of showing horses are based on an estimate of expenditures at Alabama horse shows in 2005 reported in a 2006 Auburn study of showing horses (K. Whiting, Joseph J. Molnar and Cynthia Ann McCall, “Alabama Equine Industry: Inventory, Impacts, and Prospects,” Alabama Agricultural Experiment Station, Bulletin 662). Menard applied Alabama 2005 equine horse show expenditures to Tennessee data, which added 500 more total jobs and \$45 million to Tennessee's gross domestic product. Adding owning and showing, the Menard 2010 equine industry results, based on 5-7-year-old data at that time, round up to 20,500 jobs and approximately \$1.5 billion as the economic significance of Tennessee's entire equine industry..

The \$3.2 billion gross national product economic impact for Tennessee Walking Horses springs spontaneously from a 2013 lobby packet created by the Performance Show Horse Association. That document asserts a \$3.2 billion loss to the national economy associated with the 2013 proposed anti-soring legislation with no supporting research.

When Alexander's office was asked, “What study did you use to get your numbers?” the respondent emailed the 37-year-old, much-questioned 1982 “Auburn Study.” That study examined the effects of chemicals, chains and stacked shoes on horses, without a shred of economic results (Ram C. Purohit, “Thermography in the Diagnosis of Inflammatory Processes in the Horse in Response to Various Chemical and Physical Factors”).

The Menard study equine results called attention to its limitations based on 2004 Tennessee equine data and 2005 Alabama horse show data. Johnson clearly cited equine economic impacts, not Tennessee Walking Horse results. Our two senators reported spurious results unsupported by economic research.

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